

MEMORANDUM FOR: The Director

Here is a Memorandum designed to meet Secretary  
Laird's request transmitted via George Carver. It  
was written finally by [ ] and checked with

[ ] (It proved more difficult to do than  
we had thought.)

[ ]  
Abbot Smith

cc: George Carver

27 March 1969  
(DATE)

FORM NO. 101 REPLACES FORM 10-101  
AUG 54 WHICH MAY BE USED.

(47)

27 March 1969

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Soviet Reactions to American Public Discussion  
of Strategic Weapons Issues

1. There is no indication thus far in Soviet public media of what the real reactions of the Soviet leaders are or will be to the Secretary of Defense's recent statements about developments in Soviet strategic forces. Comment on the American decision to deploy ABM's has mainly replayed the arguments of US opponents, particularly those which point to the high cost and probable ineffectiveness of the system. But the tone has been hardening; for example: "The Safeguard system does not bank on disarmament or stronger peace through negotiations, but on a drive for arms with all the dangerous consequences that it spells." There has not been so far any direct comment on Secretary Laird's statements on Soviet capabilities and intentions.

2. It is extremely unlikely that we will find Soviet public or private sources discussing these issues in other than vague innuendo. There is the awkwardness of attacking the American ABM decision against the background of Soviet

claims for some years that the USSR was itself acquiring ABM capabilities. More important, it would be quite uncharacteristic for the Soviets to enter upon exchanges, public or private, which disclose particulars of their own military position. They will not confirm our estimate of the characteristics of the SS-9, tell us how many they intent to build, or whether they plan MIRV's for this or another missile. If they are not willing to engage with the Secretary's statements on a quite specific and technical level, whatever notice they do take of them will not convey very much.

3. Being so contrary to their own practice, the disclosures of US intelligence judgments on Soviet weapons systems have no doubt surprised the Soviets. But this has happened so often by now that they have probably come to understand that this is simply one of the mysteries of the American political process. They are unlikely to think that there is any malign purpose in the act of disclosure itself, but will read it as part of the Administration's effort to carry its case in the political arena.

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4. The most serious questions the Soviet leaders will ask themselves will have to do with the implications of the stated American belief that the USSR may be aiming to acquire a counterforce posture. They will be puzzled and prone to suspect some devious purpose, if only because American public discourse of recent years has regularly emphasized that neither the US nor the USSR could expect to achieve a reliable first-strike capability.

5. Their first reaction will no doubt be to suspect that the US is making public statements about Soviet intentions in this regard because it has itself the intention to achieve a first-strike posture. The practice of accusing an opponent of aggressive intentions one entertains oneself is very much in the Soviets' own style. Moreover, their knowledge of US plans to enlarge US offensive capabilities by modernizing missile systems will dispose the Soviets to this view. Because this kind of interpretation is so congenial to Soviet ways of thinking, elements in the Soviet establishment who have never accepted the idea that strategic weapons forces on both sides could or should be stabilized, will be likely to gain in influence.

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6. If this is so, we could expect over time to see an acceleration of Soviet programs aimed at countering the anticipated buildup in US forces. This would take some time to manifest itself, and, of course, as viewed from the American side would not be identifiable as a response, since we would not know what the original Soviet program goals might have been.

7. Apart from such implications for their own programs, the Soviets' attitude toward proposed talks to control the size of strategic forces will also be affected. Mistrust of US purposes in such talks will be heightened. Those on the Soviet side who have argued that the US is not "sincere" and plans some treachery will have their suspicions heightened. Those Soviets who already favor a serious effort to control strategic arms may think that the recent US statements make the opening of talks all the more urgent. But the more important effect is likely to be that the weight of those who have all along opposed the effort to negotiate an agreement on strategic arms will be increased. This will be the more true the longer the opening of talks is delayed. If

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Soviet opinion hardens in interpreting the recent American statements to mean that the US aims at rebuilding its advantage in strategic weapons, the talks will become much more difficult.